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The Thursday R6 Update

Honored in Argentina

Robin Stoddard has been slogging her way through April snowfalls in the upper Skokomish River watershed in the Olympic National Forest. She is the Forest's hydrologist.

With her are fellow Olympic NF employees and some members of the Skokomish Watershed Action Team (SWAT). They are discussing plans for stewardship timber sales, road stabilization and improvement projects, and road decommissioning for the new field season and out-years.



Picture at left: Smokey Bear and Robin (at right) in Argentina.

On a particularly snowy day, Robin recalls her participation last October in the World Forestry Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, where

SWAT and the Forest Service were recognized for their world-class collaborative partnership. "It was a lot warmer and drier in Argentina," she said.

About 7,000 people from around the world shared their concerns and successes about community forestry, climate change, restoration, and ecosystem services. "There was a lot of interest in the work we've accomplished in the 'Skok,' said Robin.

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“They were impressed at the team’s ability to collaborate in planning future work with partners focused upon basin-wide restoration, which transects multiple ownerships with an ‘all lands concept.’ This includes NFS land, private timberland, private and public power utilities, private residential and agricultural lands, and the Skokomish Indian Tribe’s lands.”

The US exhibit theme was “People and Forests: Seeking the Balance.” Robin was invited to staff one of three restoration case studies, the restoration of the Skokomish River watershed led by SWAT and the Forest Service.

Joining Robin at the conference was SWAT member Keith Dublanica from the Mason Conservation District, and Cecilia Clavet of The Wilderness Society. The Society organized SWAT in 2005. Shelley Gardner, Forest Service International Programs, was policy advisor and part of the exhibit team.

“It was exciting work from the very beginning,” said Robin. “I didn’t learn until early Fall that I was to jointly staff the exhibit and also be Smokey’s escort. Fire prevention is a worldwide effort, and Smokey is very famous beyond the US. He drew a big crowd!”

There were some fun events after hours such as the reception for the US Delegation, hosted at the residence of Vilma Socorro Martinez, the US Ambassador to Argentina. “What an honor for this backwoods hydrologist,” said Robin. “Ambassador Martinez was so charming and welcoming to our SWAT crew. Smokey enjoyed it too.”

So, why the excitement about the “Skok?”

The Skokomish is the most frequently flooded river in Washington State. It has an important story to be told, says Rich Geiger of the Mason Conservation District and member of SWAT. “It is the largest fresh-water source for Hood Canal. The low-dissolved oxygen problem in the canal is centered at the mouth of the Skokomish River, which is critical habitat for endangered Chinook, Coho, summer-run Chum, and steelhead fish species.

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“The health of the entire watershed is vital to the Forest Service, and to Green Diamond Resources which is the principal private forest land owner. It is important to generations of farmers and other landowners in the valley, and to the Skokomish Indian Tribe whose ancestors drew food, fiber and spiritual sustenance from the Skokomish watershed and Hood Canal,” Geiger said.

Memories from the excitement of Buenos Aires aside, 2010 will be a busy season. The Forest Service and SWAT are always looking ahead 2-3 years in planning work and securing funding, says Mike Anderson who organized SWAT five years ago. SWAT collaborated with the Olympic NF on its first stewardship timber sale in the Skokomish watershed. Mike is senior resource analyst for The Wilderness Society and a resident of Seattle.

“One of our ‘big ticket items’ this summer is implementation of an in-stream large woody debris placement project in the main channel of the South Fork Skokomish River. The Forest Service will use \$2 million of Legacy Roads and Trail funding to decommission 30 miles of old logging roads. This work supplements roughly \$5.5 million in Forest Service restoration supported by SWAT since 2005, and \$10.6 million in restoration projects completed on the Olympic before SWAT’s founding, between the early 1990s and 2004.”

A project outside of the Olympic NF is further restoration of the Skokomish River estuary and Nalley’s Island in Hood Canal by the Skokomish Indian Tribe. This is among the largest estuary restoration projects ever attempted in Washington State.

Another player with SWAT is the US Army Corps of Engineers. The Corps this summer launches public involvement activities in the Skokomish valley outside of the Olympic National Forest. The Corps’ Skokomish General Investigation will determine what is needed and what is possible to restore the river channel and reduce flooding on the valley floor.

So, a very busy summer for SWAT, the Olympic National Forest and the Corps!

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At right, Dave Hererra and Robin at Hood Canal conference



Epilogue: In November, the 2009 Hood Canal Environmental Achievement Awards were announced. Robin Stoddard was among 10 individuals, organizations and communities honored for their dedication to protecting, enhancing and restoring the natural resources of the Hood Canal watershed. She was nominated for the honor by Joseph Pavel, Natural Resources Director for the Skokomish Indian Tribe. Dave Hererra, Skokomish Tribal Fisheries, made the presentation.

Mike Anderson and SWAT were honored in December 2009 by the Skokomish Grange for service to the community. SWAT and Olympic NF folks, on their own time and out of their own pockets, have made necessary repairs to the Skokomish Grange Hall, to restore the facility for meetings and other community gatherings.

(Contributors to this story: Mike Anderson of The Wilderness Society; Rich Geiger and Keith Dublanica, Mason Conservation District; Robin Stoddard, Olympic NF; Allen Gibbs, PNW Region LA/PA/Partnerships Group. Photos of World Forestry Congress courtesy of Cecilia Clavet, Wilderness Society; and Sue Texeira, Hood Canal Coordinating Council.)